

Getting Started: Using the Main Street Approach

Steps to Launch a Commercial Revitalization Program

Apply for designation, if applicable: For more information contact the Montana Main Street program.

Get informed: Get a copy of the *Main Street Board Members Handbook* to learn about starting a Main Street program. The handbook discusses options for an organizational model, along with other details, such as the financial costs of running a Main Street program. Another helpful book is the Center's basic manual, *Revitalizing Downtown*, which offers a detailed explanation of how the Main Street approach works.

Incorporate the organization: Determine which organizational model will work best. If you plan to incorporate as a nonprofit organization, get an application from the IRS website (www.irs.gov) to obtain tax-exempt status. If you decide on another organizational model, contact the appropriate city agency or organization to begin discussions. Work with an attorney, if possible, to write by-laws and articles of incorporation and file them with the appropriate state agency. Sample by-laws can be found in this website's Knowledge Base. Contact your city about regulations, business licenses, and/or any fees. Select an address or set up a post office box for mail deliveries, and choose a contact person for phone communications.

Recruit board members and develop committees: Learn more about structuring a Main Street program's board and committees in the *Main Street Board Members Handbook*. Recruit board members from your working group or elsewhere to lead the organization, and draw upon enthusiastic individuals from your community meetings to serve on committees. Establish board and committee roles, including board president, officers, and committee chairs.

Visit another community: With your board and committee members or working group, take a field trip to other downtowns or commercial districts to meet with peers, hear about lessons learned, and see how your commercial district compares.

Tap into the Network: Sign up for the National Trust Main Street Center's Network Membership, which will bring you a monthly newsletter full of news and ideas; access to member-only information; and the Main Street List Serve, a forum for discussion among revitalization peers.

Draft a budget: Draw up a budget that corresponds with your plans. Decide if you can afford to hire a program director, or more importantly, if you can afford *not* to. Read about staff, budget structures, and potential funding sources in the *Main Street Board Members Handbook* and *Revitalizing Downtown*. Look at sample budgets from other Main Street communities with the same size population in the National Main Street Center online Knowledge Base. Talk with other community entities about financial support. Develop job descriptions for board members, officers, committee chairs, committee members, and staff. Descriptions can be found in the *Main Street Board Members Handbook* and Committee Member Handbooks. Other Main Street organizations can also provide samples.

Montana Main Street
Montana Department of Commerce
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Train and inform participants: Educate your board and committee members. Use slide shows or PowerPoint presentations. Distribute copies of the Center's Committee Member Handbooks. Tour the neighborhood with all board and committee members to inspect the district and get to know it well.

Develop a fund-raising plan: Draw up a plan outlining financial support for the program. Remember those stakeholders you contacted early on in the process? Now you will need to work with them as potential supporters. Funds should come from a diverse range of sources, not just one entity, to ensure financial security. Sources include local government, large and small businesses, membership programs, fund raising, community groups, earned income, corporate sponsors, and foundation donations.

Develop a work plan: Develop a work plan that includes a vision for the district, a mission statement, and a set of goals, both long and short term. Don't overwhelm your first year's work plan with too many projects; prioritize your activities by choosing projects that are easy to accomplish as well as those that can have visible impact while you are building capacity. More information on how and why to do work planning can be found in the *Main Street Board Members Handbook* as well as *Revitalizing Downtown*.

- Schedule regular meetings with board members and committees, as well as with stakeholders and partners.
- Recruit volunteers for key projects, events, and activities; create a volunteer file and develop a volunteer recognition system.

Promote the program: Use a variety of public relations tools, including brochures, newsletters, article placement, and website to get the word out. Develop a media list for press releases.

Take inventory of what you have: Identify economic development and historic preservation resources in your community. Inventory the district's buildings, businesses, parking, etc., including photos.

Collect information: Begin to build your own clearinghouse of resource materials by collecting website addresses, articles, books, presentations, sample documents, and samples of marketing materials. What you don't use now you eventually will. Join and use the Main Street List Serve, (a benefit of the National Trust Main Street Center's Network Membership), to connect with other Main Street program directors, board members, and volunteers and learn about their challenges and solutions. Use this website's Knowledge Base to research sample documents and past articles from *Main Street News* to build your files. Identify existing events and collect information on past promotional activities. Collect and review any studies, market analyses, or master plans that have been done.